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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0258
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0914
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0085
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY 0369
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 002255

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ISRAELI AMBASSADOR SAYS ELITE
DISSATISFIED

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4 (B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Israeli Ambassador in Astana asserts many in the elite are dissatisfied about President Nazarbayev,s alleged isolation and lack of a plan of succession. The Israeli Embassy,s main functional interest is trade, with &modest military sales8 that include unmanned aerial vehicles. The Israeli Ambassador said he would again seek support for the Dushanbe synagogue from Kazakhstani oligarch Aleksandr Mashkevich. When asked why he was serving a second tour as Ambassador to Kazakhstan, he replied that it takes &tough guys8 to succeed in Kazakhstan. END SUMMARY.

A PROGRESSIVE KHAN, BUT STILL A KHAN

¶2. (C) Ambassador called on new Israeli Ambassador Israel Mei-Ami on November 13. Mei-Ami arrived in Astana in September for his second tour as Ambassador (previous tour: 1996-2002). Drawing on his past experience in Kazakhstan and because his native language is Russian, he already has a broad circle of social contacts among the intelligentsia, business community, and the upper mid-levels of the government. He said he has found them to be almost uniformly critical of President Nazarbayev, alleging that his close advisers, ministers, and governors (akims) are increasingly sycophantic and shield him from bad news, especially about the economy. Emphasizing that his contacts are not in opposition,8 Mei-Ami said they feel the government is not doing enough to manage the financial crisis. They also complain that Nazarbayev, now 72 years old, has no clear plan of succession. They tell Mei-Ami it is &impossible8 First Daughter Dariga would be considered. Mei-Ami characterized Nazarbayev as a &Central Asian khan,8 not dissimilar) at least in psychology) to other presidents in the region, although he is significantly more progressive: &The khan in Tashkent (President Islom Karimov) thinks it,s enough if he gives stale bread and weak tea to his people.8

¶3. (C) Mei-Ami said Tel Aviv,s fundamental interest in Kazakhstan is to maintain strong, positive relations with a moderate Muslim country as a balance against Iran. But that,s easy, he said, because there is &absolutely no

anti-Semitism in Kazakhstan⁸ and, since its independence, has always been a strong friend of Israel. Mei-Ami said several members of parliament in Astana are Jewish, including the colorful television personality Daria Klebanova, as well as several vice ministers, &although they do not advertise their Jewishness.⁸

FROM SCALPLES TO DRONES

¶4. (C) Mei-Ami said the second Israeli priority, and what takes most of his time, is trade) predominantly agricultural, medical, and high-technology equipment. Kazakhstan plans to send an 80-member trade mission to Israel in December. When queried, Mei-Ami admitted Israel has &relatively modest⁸ military sales to Kazakhstan, including telecommunications, artillery for two battalions, night-vision goggles and other high-tech supplies, and &a number of unmanned aerial vehicles.⁸ He said Israel would like to increase military sales, but &laws on both sides are burdensome,⁸ and Tel Aviv is &fastidious about end-user concerns.⁸

HELP FOR THE DUSHANBE SYNAGOGUE?

¶5. (C) Aware of the Ambassador,s past tour in Tajikistan, Mei-Ami asked about the status of the synagogue in Dushanbe. When the Ambassador queried why Jewish Central Asian or diaspora leaders have done nothing to finance a new synagogue and community center for that small community, he shrugged and said, without elaborating, &internal disputes.⁸ He said he had once pressed Israeli billionaire (born in

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Uzbekistan) Lev Leviev to take an interest in the issue, but had gotten nowhere. Mei-Ami expressed satisfaction that Rabbi David Gurevich, the controversial &Rabbi of Central Asia⁸ who occasionally intervened with the government of Tajikistan about the Dushanbe synagogue, is no longer in the region, having lost his visa to live in Tashkent. Mei-Ami dismissed him as -hing but a trouble-maker.⁸ At the ambassador,s urging, Mei-Ami said he would raise the Dushanbe synagogue issue again with Kazakhstani oligarch Aleksandr Mashkevich.

¶6. (C) Mei-Ami lamented that his embassy is so small) only an Ambassador and a DCM/jack-of-all-trades &who spends most of his time on security.⁸ He said he has petitioned Tel Aviv for, at a minimum, a military attach and a trade attach, but so far the Ministry of Finance has not funded these positions. When asked why he is back for a second tour as Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Mei-Ami admitted he would have preferred a comfortable post in South America, but Tel Aviv ran through two Ambassadors to Kazakhstan after he left) &young smart guys who weren,t tough enough to succeed here.⁸

¶7. (U) BIO NOTE: Mei-Ami was born in 1947 in Atyrau (then Guriyev), Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, of Ashkenazi parents who had fled Poland/Ukraine to Uzbekistan during World War II. In 1956, the family moved to Ukraine, and then emigrated to Israel via Poland in 1960. In the 1980s, Mei-Ami filled diplomatic positions in Ecuador and Mexico. He was Israel,s Ambassador to Uzbekistan (1992-1994), and served twice in leadership positions in the Israeli Foreign Ministry,s Central European and Eurasian Department. He is married and has two children. He speaks Hebrew, Russian, English, Spanish, Polish, and French.
HOAGLAND